



Council Hall
(Old Salt Lake City Hall)
300 North State Street

One of the American West's Most Historic Buildings--served for almost 30 years as the seat of government of Salt Lake City and as the meeting place for the territorial legislature. Constructed in 1864-1866 at 120 East 1st South. It was dismantled in 1961 and restored on Capitol Hill to make way for the new Federal Building. It is now an official state information center and home of the Utah Travel Council and Zion Natural History Association Book store.

THREE DECADES OF HISTORY

In January 1866, when this building was dedicated as the New City Hall, Great Salt Lake City was the economic, social, and political capital of a vast, thinly populated region that included a somewhat larger area than present day Utah. The city had been settled for little more than 18 years when new City Hall was completed; it was in the midst of momentous events and on the threshold of an even more critical, tumultuous era, which is unique in American history.

From the perspective of today, the 29 years during which this dignified old structure served as the seat of government of Salt Lake City and home of the territorial legislature were perhaps the most fascinating, most romantic, and most interesting years in Utah's history. They were years of expanding population and empire building; of bitter legal, political and economic struggles between Mormons and non-Mormons; of threatened military action, unpopular federal officials, disfranchisement of thousands of Utah voters, and imprisonment of hundreds.

During these eventful years the settlement of Utah was completed. The transcontinental rails were joined at Promontory. Brigham Young and most of the other great 3-Mormon leaders of his generation passed away. Utah's mineral treasures were discovered and opened to development. Non-Mormons increased in numbers and influence.

Almost 30 years to the day after the dedication of new City Hall in 1866, Utah became a state. Though the venerable building was no longer City Hall on that memorable day of January 4, 1896, having surrendered that honor a year earlier to the newly completed joint City and County Building, it had been the scene probably of more important history-making than any other Utah building of its time. Its tale is a fascinating story that would take volumes to tell in detail. This file can only touch on the highlights of its history and hint at the wealth of anecdotes that could be told.

CITY HALL IS BUILT

In April of 1858, the City Council of Great Salt Lake City dedicated its first modest City Hall during a time of crisis and uncertainty. The United States (Johnston's) Army was at the borders of Utah and the Mormons were preparing to evacuate the city. This crisis passed, but within the next few years the small building proved inadequate for a growing city. In 1863 a committee was appointed to draft plans for a new hall. Ground was broken on February 8, 1864; and the new building was dedicated almost two years later. Its cost was \$70,000.

The dedication of New City Hall (Council Hall) on January 8, 1866, was one of the most colorful social events in the city's history to that date. Its description occupied 23 pages in the

Council's minute book as well as considerable newspaper space. The dedicatory prayer was given by George Q. Cannon and speeches delivered (in the order listed) by Mayor Abraham O. Smoot, Territorial Governor Charles Durkee, George Albert Smith, John Taylor, President Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball. The ceremonies lasted for two hours. Other persons of prominence at the dedication included Daniel H. Wells, Amos Reed (secretary of the territory), president and members of the City Council, speaker and members of the House of Representatives, Judge of Probate, county and city officers.

In the evening, a grand banquet was held on the second floor, with the large west room serving as a ballroom and the Council chamber (east room) being "gorgeously fitted up" as a drawing room. Smaller rooms "were fitted up with richly furnished tables, supplied with every variety of meats, poultry, vegetables, pastry, pies, and desserts." Many of the leaders of the church, territory, military, city and county were guests at the banquet.

Architect of the New City Hall was William H. Folsom, then architect of the Mormon Church. Mr. Folsom had designed the Salt Lake Theatre several years prior and was later to appointed to design and build the famous Tabernacle, Assembly Hall, St. George and Manti temples, ZCMI building, and many other church and commercial buildings. As assistant to Truman O. Angell, he was superintendent of work on the Salt Lake Temple for a number of years. Mr. Folsom's daughter, Harriet Amelia, was a wife of Brigham Young.

DESCRIPTION OF NEW CITY HALL

At the time of dedication, the Salt Lake Daily Telegraph described City Hall in great detail. Of its interior, the paper said: "The ground floor contains six spacious rooms used for police and other purposes, the police court being 22 feet by 27. On the upper northeast floor we have a Council Hall 23 feet by 45, and on the northwest a Courtroom nearly seven feet in diameter with highly enriched cornices and centerpieces. Pilaster architraves adorn the windows and doors of both rooms, which are superbly grained in mahogany, root oak, and reflect great credit on the artists engaged. At the back of the Court and Council Rooms, we have ample well-furnished offices, suitable for committee and reception rooms.

The principal rooms are richly carpeted and furnished with all the accessories requisite for the purposes intended. The Council Chamber is enlivened by some handsome engravings, and further adorned by a full length portrait of President B. Young, painted by the talented artist Mr. Perry."

In any public building, functions change with the years. So it was with City Hall, but all the changes it underwent through the years cannot be described here. However, a description of its occupants in 1869, three years after its completion, is interesting. According to Sloan's Directory and Business Guide for 1869, the City Hall contained the following: "The Mayor's, Recorder's and City Treasurer's offices; an Alderman's and Justice's Court room; Council Chamber, Territorial Library; City Attorney's office, and that of the Adjutant General of the Nauvoo Legion—the territorial militia. The sessions of the Legislative Assembly are held in this Hall." The Hall continued to serve as home of the territorial legislature until completion of the joint City and County Building in 1894.

HIGHLIGHTS OF HISTORY

During most of the years in which the building served as City Hall and home of the territorial legislature, members of the LDS/Mormon Church (Mormons comprising by far the larger part of the population) were in control of the city government and legislature. This was so in varying degree until 1890, when the Liberal party (non-Mormon) gained control of the city government. During these years Mormon government was challenged by non-Mormons in many ways and City Hall was an important center of political struggle for many years. Some of the more interesting events connected with the hall included:

- 1868 October – Brigham Young called a meeting of Mormon merchants at City Hall, a meeting that resulted eventually in the formation of ZCMI.
- 1870 February – The territorial legislature passed the female suffrage act, reluctantly signed by Acting Governor S.A. Mann who expressed “very grave and serious doubts of the wisdom and soundness of that political economy which makes the act a law of this Territory... I have, as before stated, approved of the bill, hoping that future experience may approve the wisdom of our action, and that the same may be found to be in harmony with the spirit and genius of the age in which we live.”
- 1871 – The city warden refused to turn over a prisoner to the federal marshal without legal authority; later (indicating the feelings then existing on the part of some non-Mormons toward Mormons), the acting U.S. Attorney said his own reaction “would have been to put the guns of Camp Douglas upon the city, blow down the City Hall and jail, and force possession of the prisoner with bayonets.
- 1872 February – The constitutional convention met at City Hall, meeting until it had drafted a constitution of the State of Deseret (presented in Congress in May without favorable action).
- 1874 June – Soldiers from Camp Douglas broke into the city jail, behind City Hall, and rescued one of their comrades.
- 1874 August – During the election for Utah’s delegate to Congress, the U.S. marshal took possession of the polls, arrested the city police captain and certain policemen. A mob at City Hall became violent and manhandled Mayor Wells, who later appeared on the balcony, read the riot act and commanded the police to restore order. There were cries of “Shoot him, shoot him,” as the police disbursed the crowd with some violence. Mayor Wells was arrested by federal officers the following day, but was soon released.
- 1875-76 – The legislative assembly served without compensation because funds appropriated by Congress for its operation had been used by the U.S. Courts.
- 1882 June – Liberty Park was opened to the public with a procession beginning at City Hall, comprising of city, federal, territorial and military officials.
- 1882 June – Edmunds anti-polygamy bill was passed by Congress, ultimately disqualifying older members of the City Council from serving in their positions.
- 1883 August – Captain Andrew Burt, city marshal and former chief of police, was assassinated on Main Street. A mob soon collected, rushed to City Hall, took the assassin from the police and lynched him in the prison yard (behind City Hall). This was the first lynching in Salt Lake City history.

1884 February – Wyoming legislators visited Salt Lake City in a body, were received and entertained by the Utah legislature, City Council, federal and military officials.

1885 July 4th – Flags at City Hall, County Court House, Salt Lake Theatre, ZCMI, Deseret News, the Tithing Office, and other places were flown at half-mast. The federal marshal and military officers, investigating at City Hall were told by the city marshal that Salt Lake City had cause for mourning (because of federal prosecutions under the Edmunds law), and that the half-masting of the flag expressed the feelings of the majority of the citizens. The mayor, on his arrival, ordered the flag to be raised to the proper position.

1894 – City government moved to the new joint City and County Building.

During many of these years, the large bell hanging in the City Hall's tower served as a general fire alarm with a certain number of rings indicating which area the fire was in.

The Later Years

After city offices moved from the building in 1894, the Council Hall served as police headquarters and police court until about 1915, when the city purchased the YMCA Building at 1st South and State and transferred the police department and police court.

Between 1915 and 1961, the Sealer of Weights and Measures, by Board of Health and Sanitary Division offices occupied the building for storage of fire department equipment and other city purposes.

Restoration

As early as 1948, plans had been made to restore the historic Council Hall, but these plans were not implemented until 1961 when its final destruction, or removal was necessitated by construction of the new federal office building on the Hall's original site.

Instrumental in planning and arranging restoration of the Council Hall was Nicholas G. Morgan, Sr., prominent Salt Lake attorney and philanthropist. Morgan devoted his efforts over a period of years to seeing that the old building was preserved for posterity. Finances for restoration of the Hall were contributed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS/Mormon Church), while the State of Utah paid for most of the furnishings and landscaping. Vacant city land at the head of State Street was donated for the building by the Salt Lake City Corporation.

The architect for the restoration was Edward O. Anderson, a distinguished Utahn who served as supervising architect for the LDS Church between 1943-49. For a number of years afterward, Anderson was later in charge of design and construction of many LDS temples located in Los Angeles, New Zealand, Switzerland and London. He was also engaged in the recent remodeling of older temples in St. George, Manti and Salt Lake City.

Dismantling of the old building commenced during the summer of 1961 and was completed that winter. More than 325 blocks of cut sandstone were removed from the façade, numbered and carefully transported to the new location. Since the original wood and plaster had deteriorated badly, careful measurements and molds were made for exact reproduction. Rough stone from the old Hall was used in reconstructing the side and rear walls of the building, and modern insulating block was bonded to the outside stone. Floors in the new building are of oak plank. A number of door locks are from the old Hall.

Most of the restoration work was completed in 1962 with furnishing and landscaping completed during 1963-64.

Okland Construction Company was in charge of the dismantling. Jensen Construction Company performed Restoration work under supervision of Anderson.

The United Veterans Council contributed a 61-foot flagpole and flag while the Daughters of Utah Pioneers constructed a historical marker.

The Building Today

In July 1963, the Council Hall was formally presented to the State of Utah. It now serves as an official state information center and home of the Utah Travel Council and Zion Natural History Association Bookstore.

With a few exceptions, such as modern office furniture, the overall furnishings date back to 1860-1890 or earlier. Some original furnishings include the portraits of Salt Lake City mayors who served when the building was used as City Hall.